

WorkFirst High Performance Bonus

Innovative Project

2002 Nomination Form

Name of project: Licensed for Employment

Local Planning Area: Yakima/Kittitas County LPA

Contact: Kathy Thomas, Tri-County Workforce Council

Telephone: (509) 574-1950

E-mail: Kathyt@co.yakima.wa.us

Project period: July 1, 2001 to June 30, 2002

Section 1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Licensed for Employment is a structured educational program and provides supportive assistance for those who have transportation barriers that interfere with their ability to obtain a valid driver's license for employment. This program attempts to modify behavior of participants by teaching them the value and responsibility of transportation.

This program relates to and supports many of the WorkFirst Performance Measures:

Caseload Reduction, Movement from Job Search to Full Time Employment, Child Support, Client Accountability, High Wage Placement, Employment Retention, Decreased Returns to TANF, Jobs Leading to Exits from TANF, and Employment Retention.

- Clients are more effective in job search as they are eligible to apply for a wider variety of jobs that were once unavailable to them without a driver's license. Job search is much less difficult as clients can drive themselves to businesses to retrieve applications and attend interviews, which facilitates full-time employment achievement.
- Clients have a means of getting to work consistently instead of depending on friends or family members to transport them to work.
- Clients retain employment as they achieve a commendable attendance record and become a valuable employee performing all functions of the job.
- The client is more marketable and desirable to employers, as they are able to drive company vehicles, provide delivery services, or transport clients. Promotions become a reality as employees are given increasingly more responsibilities.
- Child support payments are increased. Division of Child Support (DCS) can put a hold on a person's driver's license until they are in compliance with payments. However, many non-custodial parents do not address the child support issue as they also have the unpaid ticket(s) issue impeding them. They feel that it doesn't matter because they cannot get their license anyway as their predicament is two-fold. Once we resolve the unpaid ticket(s) issue for them, they have an incentive to address the child support issue as actual attainment of a driver's license is now possible upon clearing DCS holds.
- High wage placement opportunities are more available as clients with specific skills and experience in certain fields are again eligible to apply for and obtain those jobs requiring a driver's license.

We have served 111 TANF and 29 low-income clients during SFY 2002. Of the TANF clients, 51% have attained their driver's license with the numbers increase daily. Of the low-income clients, 48% have obtained their driver's license. In the beginning of the program, the cost per person was \$1300. Due to budget concerns, we have streamlined the program by removing the intensive case management and can now offer the program for \$325 per client. The impact of the program is still as effective and the main goals are still achieved.

This program meets the second purpose of TANF to end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage.

Section 2. PROJECT INNOVATION

Without the ability to drive, many individuals cannot search for, obtain, maintain employment, or take advantage of advancement opportunities. Although many people take for granted the possession of a valid driver's license, the lack of this small plastic card is an all too common reality for many individuals. A suspended license has had its deepest impact on low-income and TANF individuals.

A simple moving violation can quickly escalate into thousands of dollars leaving many with little or no options for restoration. It generally begins with a traffic stoppage for a speeding ticket or defective equipment and ends with a \$490 ticket for “no proof of liability insurance”. Fear or lack of education causes many to ignore the problem hoping that it will simply ‘go away’. However, the problem does not go away and escalates when they are pulled over again being given not only a ‘no insurance ticket’ but ‘Driving While License Suspended’ (DWLS) ticket as well; a criminal violation technically punishable by vehicle impound and jail time.

Before July of 2001, the only option available to those in this predicament was to pay their fines in full (not a reality for most low-income individuals) or declare bankruptcy (not a logical option for those with only traffic ticket debt). We have created a program that is win-win for all parties involved. The courts collect on revenue owed, decrease their dockets, and reduce the number of inmates jailed for criminal traffic tickets. The client benefits by staying out of jail-which can cause them to lose their jobs or children, reducing their debt, and being able to remove a barrier to employment that once seemed insurmountable.

A new, innovative solution is to provide 20 hours of educational instruction, which teaches individuals to be accountable for paying their traffic tickets while allowing them to be licensed. Course graduates are allowed to enter into a one-time opportunity for early re-instatement through a Payment-Issued Adjudication (PIA) agreement. Once the PIA is completed, the Department of Licensing is notified and the suspension is removed enabling the participant to obtain a valid Washington State Driver’s License (WSDL). The participant then completes the program requirements by showing proof of insurance for any vehicle they operate.

The course teaches financial responsibility and traffic safety. The impact of this course and the subsequent attainment of the actual driver’s license have exceeded our expectations. We have seen dramatic shifts in the attitudes of course participants. The court is now seen as a problem-solving community partner and graduates are confident of their rights and now have the skills to navigate through a once intimidating system. Clients are taking responsibility for their actions and express a sincere desire to resolve the matters that have led to the suspension and are motivated to never become entangled in a licensing problem again. It is quite remarkable to see how something as seemingly simply as a driver’s license can relieve stress and allow them to concentrate on what opportunities are now available to them. Many feel that if they can accomplish something they thought would take years (until their balances were paid in full), they can accomplish other feats as well. We have seen clients motivated to go on to get their GED so they can apply for the jobs in the healthcare industry or construction industry that they otherwise could not obtain without a license.

Section 3. PARTNERSHIPS

Many new partnerships have been established during the evolution of this project. Major partnerships with the courts were established first. We have the support of all Yakima County Courts and Kittitas County Courts, enabling us to help a broad spectrum of clients from different geographic location from Ellensburg to the Yakima County lower valley.

Other partners include the applicable collection agencies and the Department of Licensing. We also have partnerships with the Department of Corrections, Yakima Police Department, Consumer Credit Counseling, and Pemco Insurance Agency.

We are all working in collaboration to make this project a success. The court cooperation is the most important piece to this puzzle. The Judges must agree to allow early reinstatement subsequent to completion of program requirements. The collection agencies must be involved as most courts send unpaid tickets to a collection agency after a certain number of days. Payment must then be made at the applicable agency. The collection agencies work with us to establish affordable payment plans for our clients.

A representative from the Yakima Police Department is one of our guest speakers in the class. Students can ask questions in a positive environment and are able to interact with a law enforcement official as a peer instead of in a negative situation out on the streets. Students shift their view of police officers and can see them as community members employed to keep the streets safe for them and their loved ones. The representative from Consumer Credit Counseling is very effective in promoting fiscal responsibility by teaching budgeting, debt reduction, and investing for the future. The Pemco Insurance representative explains all aspects of insurance and answers questions with expertise only a trained, veteran insurance professional can. Students leave with an understanding of the types of coverage they will need for their individual situation and are much more savvy consumers. They also realize the importance of insurance coverage and the long-term catastrophic financial ramifications an uninsured accident can have.

Every other month, the partners gather for a Steering Committee Meeting to discuss updates, statistics and issues or concerns. If not everyone is able to attend, the minutes of the meeting are faxed or e-mailed to committee members. Status updates are sent via e-jas or faxed on a regular basis to the case managers at DSHS and all WorkFirst partners are updated at the LPA Meetings.

People for People is proud to offer this new service to DSHS Clientele. In the past, the issue of transportation has been frustrating to case managers as well as clients due to lack of information and little or no options for license reinstatement. One of many barriers is removed allowing WorkFirst participants to engage in job search, apply for better paying jobs, and retain those jobs to become self-sufficient.

Are additional materials available upon request? ☒ Yes ☐ No

Please email this form and mail or FAX an additional page with the signatures of the mandatory partners in your Local Planning Area. All partners must agree to nominate this project.

Nominations are due by 5:00 p.m., Tuesday, October 15, 2002 to:

Julie Baker (e-mail: julieb@cted.wa.gov)
OTED WorkFirst P.O. Box 42525
Olympia, WA 98504-2525
Physical Address: 128 10th Ave SW, Olympia, WA 98504-252
FAX : 360/664-3310

Phone: 360/725-4135